

Narrative

1. Project Design

The Portland Museum of Art (PMA) seeks a grant of \$142,720 over 18 months from IMLS to support the second phase of a major visitor experience initiative. Our goals are visitor-centered: make it easier for visitors to find the Museum, provide simple tools for navigating three interconnected buildings and comfortable areas to gather and rest, and integrate new content delivery systems into the overall design environment of the museum by creating interpretive stations that encourage active and engaging experiences with works of art.

The PMA has experienced extraordinary success in the last two decades, with an active exhibition program, a capital campaign for the restoration and reopening of two historic buildings in 2002, high levels of attendance and membership, award-winning programs and staff, the recent purchase of Winslow Homer's studio, and a continually balanced budget. With staff and board focused on growth, however, our environmental and interpretive design efforts have not kept pace. The result is a confusing mix of the Museum's two major design moments—1983 and 2002. Our Board and staff understand the importance and necessity of integrating our design and program efforts under the umbrella of visitor experience for the 21st century, so we can get our visitors into the building, help orient them to our offerings, and engender collection-based learning.

We have already made great progress in Phase I (2004-2006) of our visitor experience project. With support from IMLS for Phase II, the PMA will dramatically improve physical and intellectual access to our collection and exhibitions for more than 140,000 annual visitors by making significant improvements to our exterior signage, implementing a new interior wayfinding system, providing comfortable resting places in gathering areas, and adding in-gallery interpretive tools that focus on our permanent collection.

a. Simplifying the Visitor Experience: Exterior Signage

The Portland Museum of Art is an urban museum, standing at the corner of a "five points" intersection in Congress Square in downtown Portland, Maine. Our three connected buildings (built 1801, 1911, and 1983) run the length of one city block. The main entrance on the 1983 postmodern façade of our Payson Building opens onto a secondary one-way street and is poorly marked, with subdued lettering above a recessed door. An internally-lit six-foot sign kiosk holding a 24 x 36 inch transparent poster stands on the sidewalk in front of the museum, but is too small to see from a moving car or from across the street. The Museum has installed numerous banners on the façade since 1983, but the streetscape creates a wind tunnel, shredding large banners. By installing a new, internally lit fifteen-foot kiosk in front of the building, backlighting the lettering above the main entrance, and installing street pole banners, we will dramatically increase the Museum's exterior visibility for out-of-town and first-time visitors, as well as Portland residents. Our impressive three-story Federal mansion, the McLellan House, stands at the end of the block opposite our front entrance, with no identifying or directional signage. A new exterior sign at the property's corner will provide additional visibility for the Museum, clarify the connection between the historic house and the Museum, and direct visitors to the front entrance.

b. Making the Museum Accessible to Enable Lifelong Learning: Interior Wayfinding

At present, our interior navigational signage consists of modest bevel-cut paper and board labels. To impart information effectively to our visitors we will establish an interior signage program that includes six, six-foot freestanding armatures that will indicate when and where programs are taking place, as well as hours, admission, and exhibition information in our entry vestibule. Six smaller armatures will provide secondary information such as "gallery temporarily closed." These armatures will be made of brushed aluminum and Plexiglas, and fabricated so we can produce and insert changing information from a large-format color printer.

In our main entry—the Great Hall—small signs sit on top of the admissions, membership, and information desks. These are difficult to see when we have large numbers of visitors entering the building, resulting in visitors approaching the wrong desk or passing through without stopping. We will install larger, more visible identification signs on each desk, as well as three flat LCD screens that will allow us to provide continuous and changing information above the admission desk. We will also install new directional signage in the elevator, outside the coatroom, and near the stairs leading to the cafe, restrooms, auditorium, and public phone. An additional program of signs suspended from the ceiling will direct visitors to the elevator, upper floor galleries, the American Art galleries, the McLellan House, and the Museum Store. We will also make the McLellan House signage welcoming and effective, by using vinyl lettering on the glass doorway into the House and suspending a sign above the doorway. In our cafe we will silkscreen Museum Café graphics onto the wall behind the counter and retrofit the daily specials board so it is functional and visually appealing.

As part of Phase I, we created a new museum map to orient visitors to our three buildings. In Phase II we will refine this map based on the feedback we have received to include color and images of art works to aid visitors in differentiating the public levels of the three buildings and to assist visitors who may not be map readers.

Visitor Comfort

The Portland Museum of Art is committed to improving the visitor experience through the use of integrated interior and graphic design within the public spaces of the institution. Phase I of the Visitor Experience Project responded to visitor feedback that consistently described our seating as uncomfortable and too low for older visitors by initiating a program of upgrading seating furniture in galleries and public spaces in 2003. The Museum issued a request for proposals to Maine designers and artisans to gather concepts for a new system of seating to replace the benches, originally installed in our landmark 1983 building. As Maine is a center for the studio furniture movement and is home to numerous custom cabinet shops, the RFP elicited 17 proposals. The working group chaired by our Chief Curator with representatives from education, development, marketing and the Board, selected a standard bench designed by Gregg Lipton, in sympathy to the interiors of the Payson Building. A second design, tailored specifically to the architecture of the Museum's Great Hall and high visitor use, was proposed by Jamie Johnston, but never executed for budgetary reasons. As part of Phase II, we will complete the seating program in our most frequented visitor gathering space.

c. Engaging our Visitors and Encouraging Close Looking

Once our visitors have found their way into the Museum, through the Great Hall, and into a gallery, we will offer them a new set of interpretive tools for understanding the objects they see. As part of Phase II, we will design opportunities for visitors to engage with works of art in the Museum's collection and exhibitions by creating *Stop to Look* stations. These self-directed interpretive moments will provide a more spontaneous and active learning experience in the galleries. Visitors will not need to decide to check out an audio or family guide at the time of admission; rather they will be able to pick up interpretive materials at their own pace as they make their way through the Museum.

Each station will stand approximately four feet tall and will include multiple pockets for thematic gallery guides, interpretive rack cards, audio wands, and family-focused *Kid Kits*. The offerings at each station will be both broad (a printed gallery guide on the art of Maine) and specific (an audio guide for Winslow Homer's *Weatherbeaten*). Interpretive materials for individual objects will encourage close reading and demonstrate that a single work can inspire multiple interpretations. We will create seven freestanding stations that will be sympathetic in material and design to the gallery seating designed by Lipton (installed in Phase I) and the new interior wayfinding system.

Each *Stop to Look* station will have:

- Three audio wands that play MP3 recordings, each for a different work of art. The audio will include interviews with curators, community members, area artists, teachers, students, and collectors, all answering the questions, “What do you see?” and “What does it mean to you?” A curator might describe the sketchy brushwork in Mary Cassatt’s *Helene is Restless* and discuss whether it is finished or unfinished; a community member might explain how the painting reminds him of how it felt to hold his own child; and a student might talk about the mystery of the hidden face of the adult who is holding the child. The audio allows for multiple interpretations of individual works of art and elevates the novice response to the painting to the same place as the traditionally-authoritarian voice of the museum.
- A thematic gallery guide. We will offer seven thematic gallery guides at all times that tell the story of our collections. These will be free of charge, uniform in format, and will communicate core information about the Museum by focusing on topics such as Maine artists, Winslow Homer, the arts and crafts of Maine, and the Joan Whitney Payson Collection of modern European art. In conjunction with more finely focused rack cards, audio information, *Kid Kits*, traditional label text, and catalogs in the Museum store, these new gallery guides will serve as important learning and navigation tools for visitors.
- A *Kid Kit* that contains materials for families to use and manipulate in the galleries as they learn about works of art together. The *Kid Kits* will contain looking activities, games, and various low-tech and no-tech strategies for intergenerational learning. We have been piloting *Kid Kits* in the galleries in 2006, and will use feedback from visitors to create the final product.
- Four choices of rack cards for visitors to use in the galleries and take with them, each with a focus on a different object in the galleries. These cards will provide traditional art historical information, as well as information about the context in which the work was created, quotes by the artist if applicable, complimentary images to help put the work in context, and questions to guide visitors through closer looking.
- A custom comment book (most stations, see below).

Project Management, Evaluation, and Process for Corrections

The Visitor Experience Project is a collaborative effort between staff and board. Our Director of Education, whose position naturally links her to the Museum’s front-line visitor experience, will serve as the project director for Phase II. She will work in concert with a team that includes our Chief Curator, Director of Marketing and PR, and our Graphic Design and Publications Manager.

The PMA is committed to continuous evaluation of installations, exhibitions, and programs. To further engender dialogue with visitors, we will install seven purpose-designed comment books in a number of strategic locations within our public spaces, including in the *Stop to Look* stations, temporary exhibition feedback kiosks, and the Great Hall. Integrating the design of these comment books within the overall program of the gallery guides and interpretive station materials will improve the conversation between program staff and our visitors. We will also hire an outside evaluator and pilot prototypes of the *Stop to Look* station and printed and audio interpretive tools. The evaluator will design surveys and train our education staff to observe and survey visitors, and compile the data. The evaluator will analyze the data and report findings to PMA educators. We will then incorporate feedback from this study into our final designs.

2. Grant Program Goals

Phase II of our visitor experience initiative fulfills the Museums for America goal of **supporting lifelong learning** by recognizing that learning in the PMA depends on a positive visitor experience. We aim to make the visitor experience as seamless as possible so we can facilitate learning and share our collections, content, and knowledge with our public. If visitors cannot find our building, they will never learn from our vast resources. The visitor experience is multi-layered, and we believe that this design program is the foundation. Our primary goal is to create a cohesive program of interior and exterior graphics and innovative in-gallery design elements that function elegantly and clearly, and lead our visitors to engaging experiences with original art. The **intended outcomes** of Phase II are that visitors of all ages and backgrounds, from the elderly to young people, will 1) perceive the Museum as friendly, engaging, enjoyable, and comfortable; 2) choose from a spectrum of learning tools focused on the collection and retain their new knowledge; 3) feel a sense of goodwill toward the Museum, resulting in active learning, repeat visitation, and increased financial support for the PMA.

3. How the Project Fits into the Strategic Plan and Mission

This high priority program will create a visual infrastructure and learning opportunities that support our mission of "inspiring and enriching the lives of diverse audiences and serving as a vital cultural center." Major curatorial and education goals in our 2002-2007 strategic plan focus on elevating the role of the permanent collection in educating visitors, providing more intense experiences for the general public, and working to harmonize and coordinate our three buildings so they function as a whole, addressing the parallel development of the arts in Europe and America from the 18th century to the present. The overarching goal is to strengthen the way our visitors enjoy and learn from works of art, and the plan charges the Museum to coordinate our physical, financial, and human resources to maximize their value in serving our visitors.

Phase II fulfills the following strategic objectives from the *Plan for the Future*:

- Establish the Museum as a full-time resource that encourages repeat visitation through innovative educational resources and a welcoming, visitor-centered environment in which to view the highest quality works of art.
- Offer more exciting resources for drop-in visitors to all three buildings including: printed self-guides of the collection for adults and for children, audio tours of the collection, activity kits for families to use in the galleries, and continued exploration of technology as a tool for education in the galleries.
- Generate the most positive first impression of the Museum by creating a team of Information Desk volunteers to specialize in visitor services and re-thinking the way the Great Hall orients visitors.
- Enhance our image as an institution that supports primary research, original scholarship, and publications revolving around the Museum's collection.

Because Phase II of the Visitor Experience Project resolves fundamental issues of visitor comfort and convenience and provides a new focus on our permanent collection, the impact of IMLS support of this project will last for many years. By making the Museum more accessible and meeting the learning needs of a variety of visitors, IMLS will be investing in our capacity to provide quality, innovative interpretation while continuing the success of our temporary exhibition program. With additional activities in the galleries and simplified navigational tools, the quality of the visitor experience will be vastly improved.

4. Strategic Plan: Process and Financial Resources

The *1995 Strategic Plan* was the Museum's guiding document over seven years for increasing attendance, restoring two historic buildings, and enhancing our financial base. Having met each of the objectives set forth in 1995, the Museum's Board and staff worked for more than one year to develop a new plan and vision. The *Plan*

for the Future, 2003-2007 was formally adopted on November 4, 2002. This plan outlines a strategy to maximize Museum resources to “expand the scope and diversity of its members and visitors and achieve new levels of excellence in serving the people of Maine and New England.”

With input from Trustees and community representatives with expertise in education, the visual arts, diversity, fundraising, and business, staff from each department proposed goals and objectives. The plan outlines measurable goals for each of the Museum’s eight departments with explicit timelines over the five-year life of the *Plan*. The Museum’s finance department subjected each element to a cost assessment to ensure the overall financial viability of the plan. Having successfully completed a major capital campaign in 2002, balanced our budget for more than ten years, and overseen a growth in endowment, the Museum continues to be in a strong financial position which will support this project. We are currently in the leadership gifts phase of an \$8.3 million capital campaign for the restoration of the Winslow Homer Studio. The January 2006 purchase of the Studio fulfilled an important objective in the 2002 plan.

5. Appropriateness of Project for Institution, Audience

The Visitor Experience Project will improve access to the Museum for **all of our visitors**. We used both informal and formal needs assessment to craft this project. Phase I began in 2003 when our 1983 Payson Building was 20 years old and we had just restored and reunited the 1801 McLellan House and 1911 Sweat Galleries with the Payson wing, opening them to the public for the first time in twenty years. The Sweat Galleries now house our collection of American art and the McLellan House is a non-traditional museum space that provides our educators and curators with a place to experiment with innovative interpretive methods.

In 2003 it became apparent that visitors had difficulty navigating the three buildings. We also knew from surveys, feedback, and comment cards (see attachments) that our street presence was lacking and first-time visitors have considerable difficulty finding the Museum, often driving or walking past the building multiple times. Many visitors had commented on our poor seating for years. In the summer of 2003, our board president spearheaded an effort to improve the visitor experience. He had a keen understanding of the Museum’s need to clarify its identity within Portland’s urban landscape and the necessity for the Museum to enhance the visitor experience by making connections to original works of art. He worked to form a Visitor Experience Committee made up of board and staff members, with the purpose of examining “all aspects of a visitor’s interaction with the Museum and to identify and address those areas where the visitor experience can be enhanced.” The Committee defined the visitor experience as “an experience initiated at the point when a person decides to visit the Museum.” The Committee considered the Museum’s website, exterior signage, parking, redesigning the Great Hall and coatroom, all public spaces of the Museum, the Museum map, wayfinding, interior signage, store location, benches, audio tours, interim signage, facility use, and a visitor services department.

After research and site visits to other museums, the Committee narrowed its focus in March 2004 to graphic identity, interior wayfinding, the Great Hall function, environmental graphics, and seating. They hired a consulting design firm, Gamble Design of Portsmouth, NH, to lead the planning of a re-branding and wayfinding project, and held focus groups with community members involved with public art, city planners, and local architects, as well as the staff and board (see attachment). The focus sessions confirmed that 60% felt our signage was poor, and 40% rated it as average. Gamble Design was critical in helping the Committee assess our graphic and visitor needs. In Phase I we completed a new logo; a redesigned coatroom; new admissions and information desks in the Great Hall; a point of sale system (VISTA) for admissions, programs, and facility use; a new website with online sales for membership, events, programs, and our store; and an interim Museum map.

With the hiring of a new Chief Curator in spring 2006, and in light of our renewed focus on visitors and our collection, the curatorial, education, and publications departments began a systematic review of our publication program. They determined that a more integrated approach would fulfill our strategic objective of placing greater emphasis on learning from the permanent collection. Currently we provide visitors with a one-page black-and-white gallery guide in the main temporary exhibition space. Additional guides periodically serve as legacy pieces for in-house exhibitions, and reflect the look of these exhibitions. The resulting variety in our publication program visually undermines our graphic identity. Additionally, some gallery guides are free, while others are available for a contribution. By creating gallery guides that are consistent and engaging in design, type of content, and are free, we will make our interpretive information much more accessible to our visitors.

The PMA Audience

Phase II of the Visitor Experience Project addresses our general walk-in visitors, who are the target of much of our strategic plan. Last year 140,184 people, including nearly 10,000 schoolchildren, visited the PMA. We have a strong membership of more than 7,600. Portland (population 65,000) is Maine's largest and most demographically diverse city; the greater Portland population is 250,000. Beyond Portland, Maine (population 1.2 million) is rural and relatively poor. The PMA is a major arts resource for audiences from all over the state. We also serve regional, national, and international tourists who travel to Maine primarily between June and October. Approximately 40% of our annual attendance occurs in those months, with out-of-town visitors accounting for 60%. From November to May, 60% of visitors are from Maine. Within Maine, the population is diverse in cultural, educational, and socioeconomic terms, marked both by economic prosperity and poverty (nearly 11% live below the poverty level). To serve as many as possible we offer free admission on Friday nights, which accounts for 20% of our annual attendance. Although Maine's minority population is small, it is concentrated in Portland. Surveys indicate that 62% of our visitors are female and married, 67% are over age 45, and 36% have post-graduate degrees. Maine has the country's oldest population with a median age of 41.2. One-in-ten visitors surveyed said that their primary destination in Portland was the PMA.

The Museum has a very strong relationship with the city and state and we are seeking to provide visitors from our community and from away with a richer experience in our expanded galleries and improved access to our growing and improving collection. Previous studies and interviews revealed the majority of our visitors identify themselves as "interested novices" who appreciate the addition of interpretive materials to guide their looking in the galleries. Portland is also a very motivated community when it comes to cultural activity and educational activities for families. Visitor interviews after the McLellan House opened showed that visitors used a minimum of three interpretive offerings, particularly the computer kiosks. Visitor studies in 2000 and 2003 revealed that our public enjoys the kind of open-ended and innovative strategies that will be in play in the new in-gallery interpretive stations. With IMLS support of Phase II we will distribute a press release to the media and recognize IMLS on all related printed materials, interpretive stations, and in our Members' Magazine.

6. Project Resources: Time and Budget

The Museum's Board of Trustees and staff have committed significant financial and human resources to the Visitor Experience Project. The Board designated a \$250,000 unrestricted gift, received in 2003, for Phase I. Board level commitment to the visitor experience continues to be strong. In August 2006 we received an endowment gift of \$250,000 from a board member for innovative interpretive strategies that engage visitors with original works of art. With the endorsement of the board's Education Committee, we will draw 5% from this endowment each year (\$12,500 in 2007) for in-gallery interpretation, including support of Phase II. The total budget for Phase II is \$287,238 and the project is slated to begin in August 2007 and be completed in 18 months. Our signage, wayfinding, and visitor comfort efforts will be completed in the first year, as will

prototypes and evaluation of the interpretive elements. The interpretive elements will be completed by January 2009. The project was planned as part of our overall activities; the planning has been completed, and the addition of a part-time graphic designer will allow our current designers to work on Phase II and ongoing projects. With an anticipated increase in graphic needs around the Winslow Homer Studio, we plan to make this position permanent following the conclusion of an IMLS grant. The PMA's development department will seek additional funds from individuals, foundations, and corporations to support Phase II of the project.

7. Project Resources: Personnel and Technology

The Visitor Experience Project by its very nature requires staff from multiple departments to work collaboratively. Because of the amount of design work required in Phase II, we will hire a part-time graphic designer. Staff will meet regularly with the board's Visitor Experience and Education Committees. **Daniel O'Leary, Ph.D.**, Director since 1993, will provide general oversight of Phase II, review all designs, and serve as liaison to our Board.

Dana Baldwin, Director of Education since 1992, will serve as Project Director for Phase II and will oversee all interpretive and evaluation aspects of the project, including identifying the locations and works of art for the interpretive stations, selecting and interviewing community members for the audio guides, providing text for the rack cards and kid kits, and working with the outside evaluator, **Debra Smith**. She will also work with outside exhibition designer **Brewster Buttfield** to design the interpretive stations, **Julia Einstein**, Coordinator of Youth and Family Programs, to develop the *Kid Kits*, and Gretchen Drown, Tours Coordinator, on the audio program.

Karin Lundgren, Graphic Design and Publications Manager since 1993, will oversee and design the majority of the graphic pieces for Phase II. She will hire and oversee a new part-time graphic design assistant who will be devoted to this project, allowing Lundgren to work on the Visitor Experience Project and the Museum's ongoing design needs. The **Graphic Design Assistant** (24 hours/week) will work with Lundgren on the design of gallery guides, interpretive materials, and interior and exterior signage. The assistant will work with staff and outside vendors and must be fluent with Adobe Creative Suite software. The position requires attention to detail, strong written and verbal communication skills, and the ability to work independently. Two years of graphic design experience on a Mac-based operating system are required, and a bachelor's degree in graphic design is preferred.

Kristen Levesque, our Director of Marketing and Public Relations since 1993, will work primarily on the exterior and interior wayfinding elements of Phase II. Working closely with Lundgren, she will oversee Neokraft's designs for exterior signage. Levesque will also work with the City of Portland and the Maine Historic Preservation Commission for necessary approvals.

Thomas Denenberg, Ph.D., our Chief Curator and Curator of American Art since June 2006, will work closely with Baldwin on the design and content of the interpretive stations and will oversee the production of the gallery guides. He will also work with Jamie Johnston and the Board committee on the new seating. Denenberg will write the gallery guides for the American collections and edit guides written by **Susan Danly**, Curator of Graphics, Photography and Contemporary Art, our **Curator of European Art** (open), and **Jessica Routhier**, Associate Curator. He will also oversee **Kris Kenow**, preparator, who will build the *Stop to Look* stations from designs prepared by Brewster Buttfield.

BUDGET FORM: Section B, Summary Budget

	\$ IMLS	\$ Cost Share	\$ TOTAL COSTS
1. Salaries and Wages	\$14,250.00	\$69,140.00	\$83,390.00
2. Fringe Benefits		\$19,847.00	\$19,847.00
3. Consultant Fees	\$2,520.00		\$2,520.00
4. Travel			
5. Supplies and Materials	\$120,450.00	\$37,628.00	\$158,078.00
6. Services	\$5,500.00	\$3,560.00	\$9,060.00
7. Student Support			
8. Other Costs			
TOTAL DIRECT COSTS (1-8)	\$142,720.00	\$130,175.00	\$272,895.00
9. Indirect Costs		\$14,343.00	\$14,343.00
TOTAL COSTS (Direct and Indirect)	\$142,720.00	\$144,518.00	\$287,238.00

Project Funding for the Entire Grant Period

1. Grant Funds Requested from IMLS	\$142,720.00
2. Cost Sharing:	
a. Applicant's Contribution	\$41,188.00
b. Kind Contribution	\$103,330.00
c. Other Federal Agencies*	
d. TOTAL COST SHARING	\$144,518.00
3. TOTAL PROJECT FUNDING (1+2d)	\$287,238.00
Percentage of total project costs requested from IMLS	49.7 %

*If funding has been requested from another federal agency, indicate the agency's name:

[illegible]

[illegible]